FABLES & HUMOUR

THE SILENT TEACHER

King Brahmadatta of Varanasi was terribly upset. His son, Prince Abja, could neither walk nor speak. The disabilities did not trouble the queen to whom her son's silence spoke much more than words but the king was distressed. He summoned every physician in the land to diagnose the malady but no one could. What was ailing the prince?

Buddhism took root in Tibet in the 7th and 10th centuries. The sacred books written in Sanskrit and Pali were translated into Tibetan by the 14th century. Today a number of stories from those earlier years are available only in Tibetan translations. This Amar Chitra Katha is based on one of them.

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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

THE SILENT TEACHER

THE PRINCE WHO WOULD NOT SPEAK

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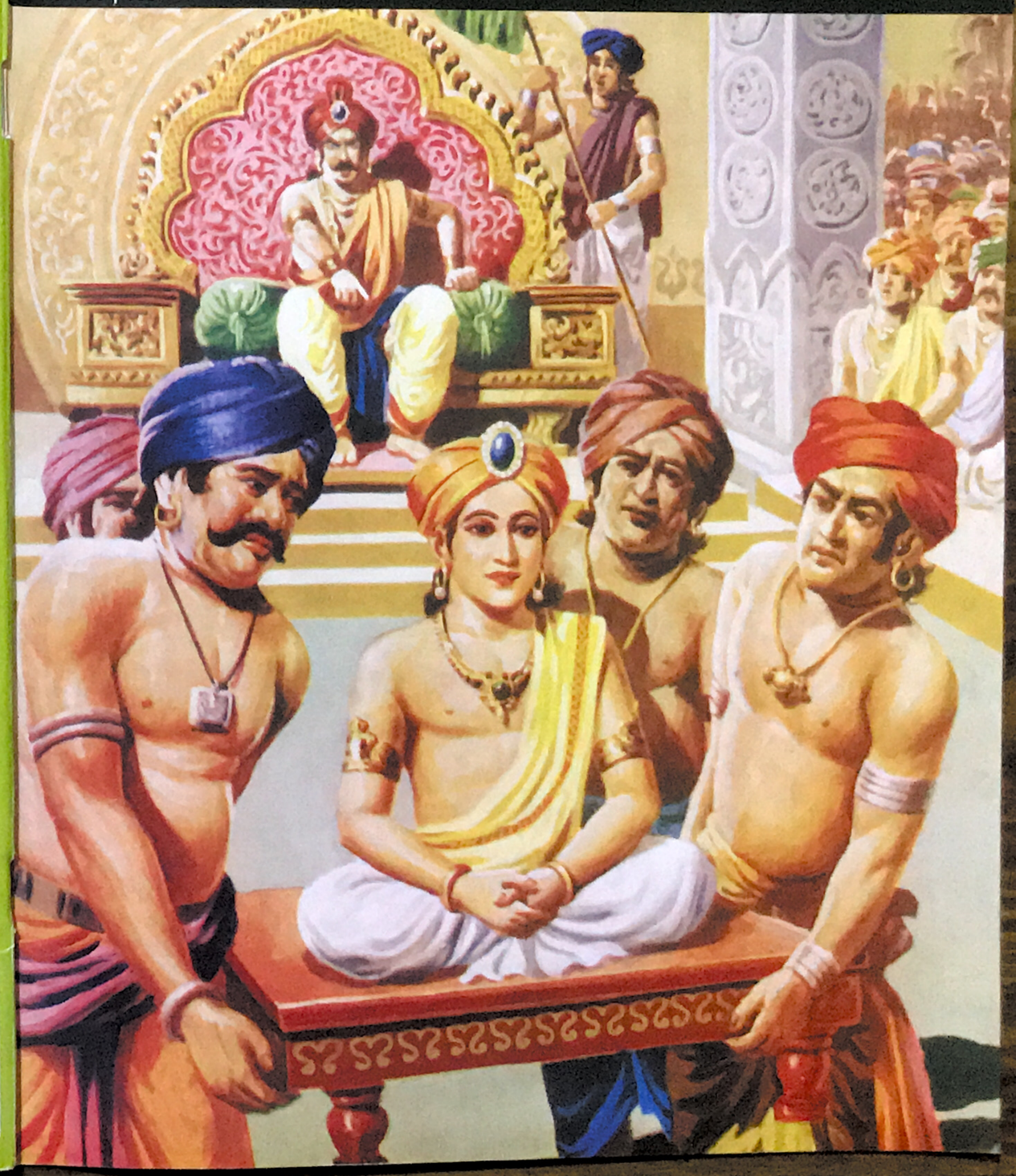
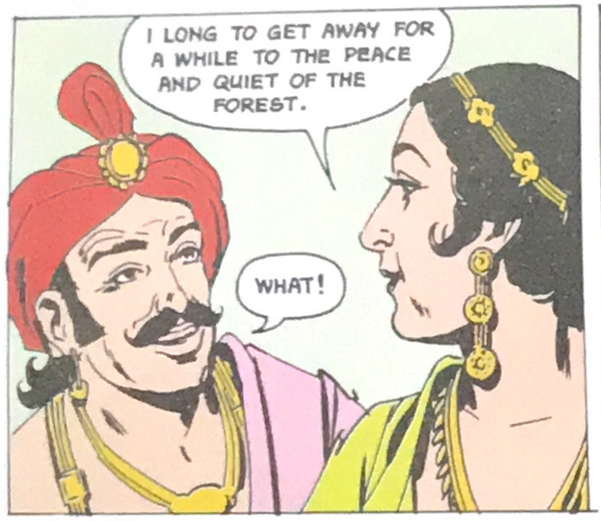
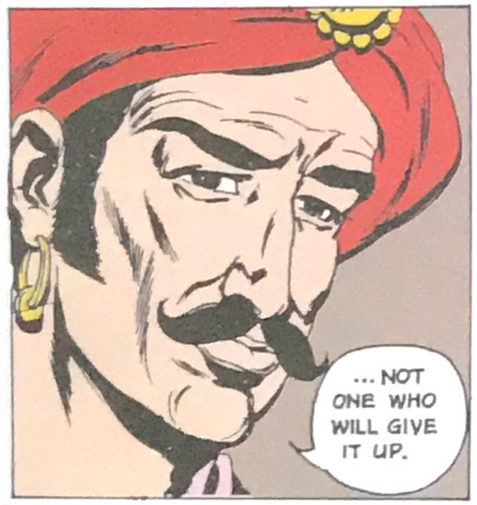


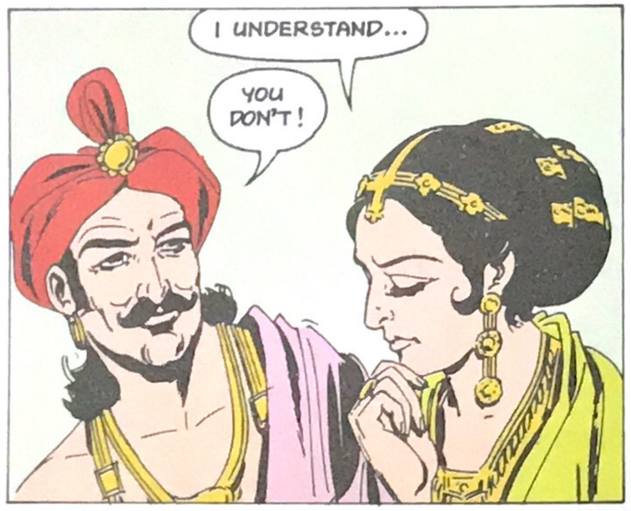
THE SILENT TEACHER

BRAHMADATTA, THE KING OF VARANASI HAD ALWAYS BEEN A LOVING HUSBAND. BUT NOW HE FELT EVEN MORE CONCERNED ABOUT HIS QUEEN'S HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING. FOR, AFTER YEARS OF LONGING FOR ONE, THEY WERE AT LAST GOING TO HAVE A CHILD.


I LONG TO GET AWAY FOR A WHILE TO THE PEACE AND QUIET OF THE FOREST.
WHAT!

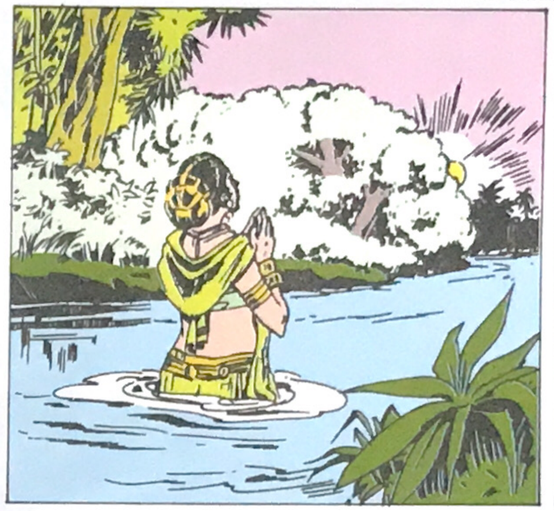
I WISH TO HAVE A SON WHO WILL RULE THE WORLD...

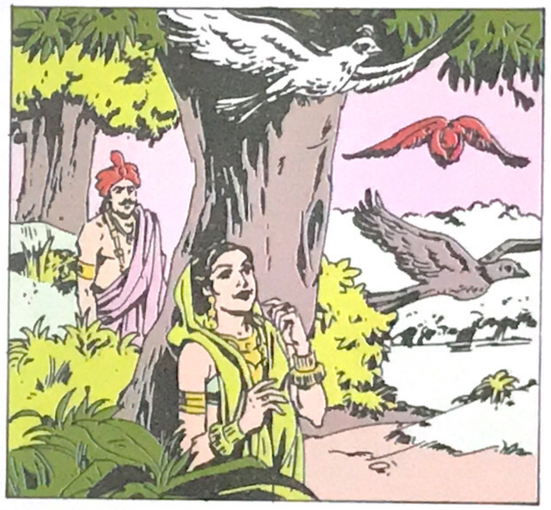

...NOT ONE WHO WILL GIVE IT UP.


I UNDERSTAND...
YOU DON'T!

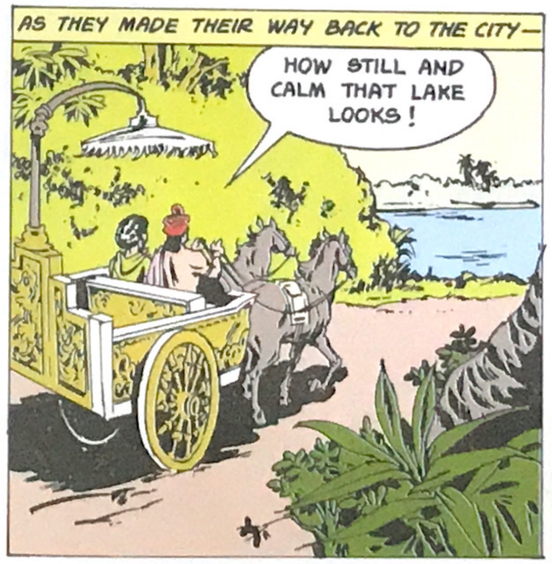
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? LET'S GO TO THE FOREST!

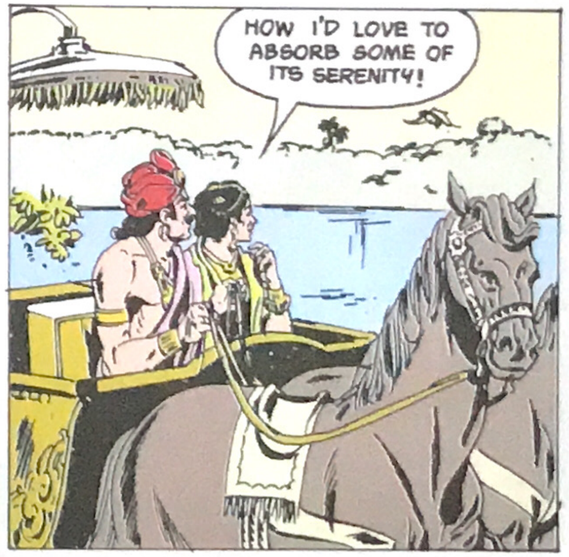
SO —



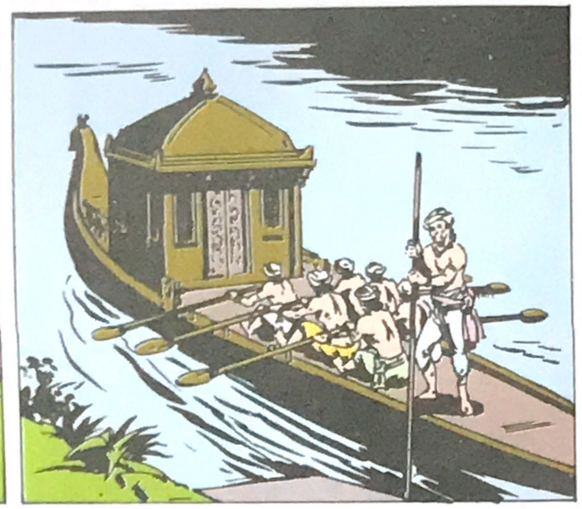


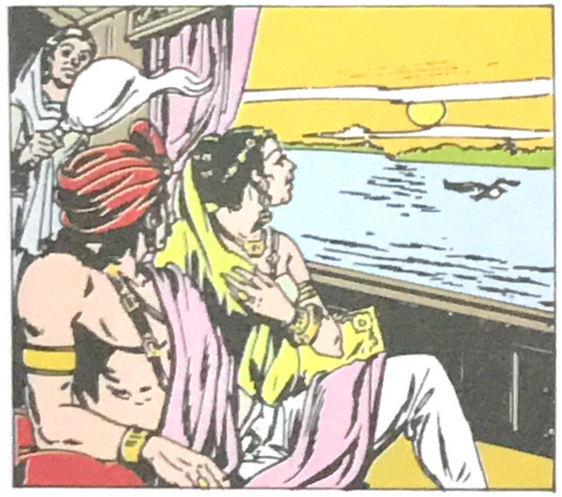
THEN, ALL TOO SOON FOR THE QUEEN—
SHALL WE GO BACK?
Y...ES.


AS THEY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE CITY—
HOW STILL AND CALM THAT LAKE LOOKS!

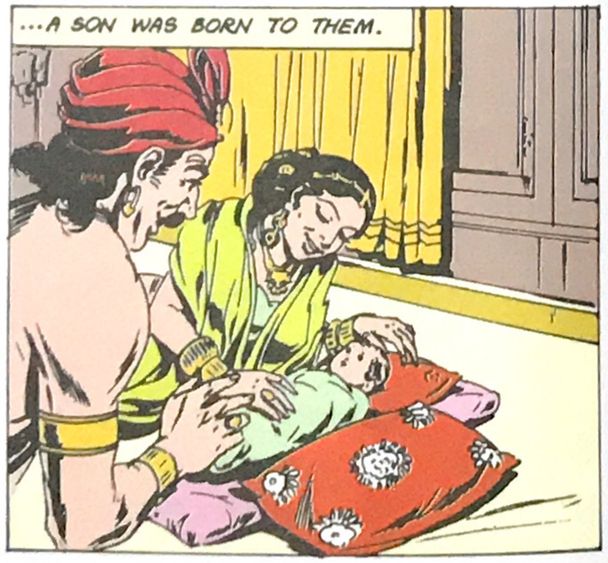

HOW I'D LOVE TO ABSORB SOME OF ITS SERENITY!

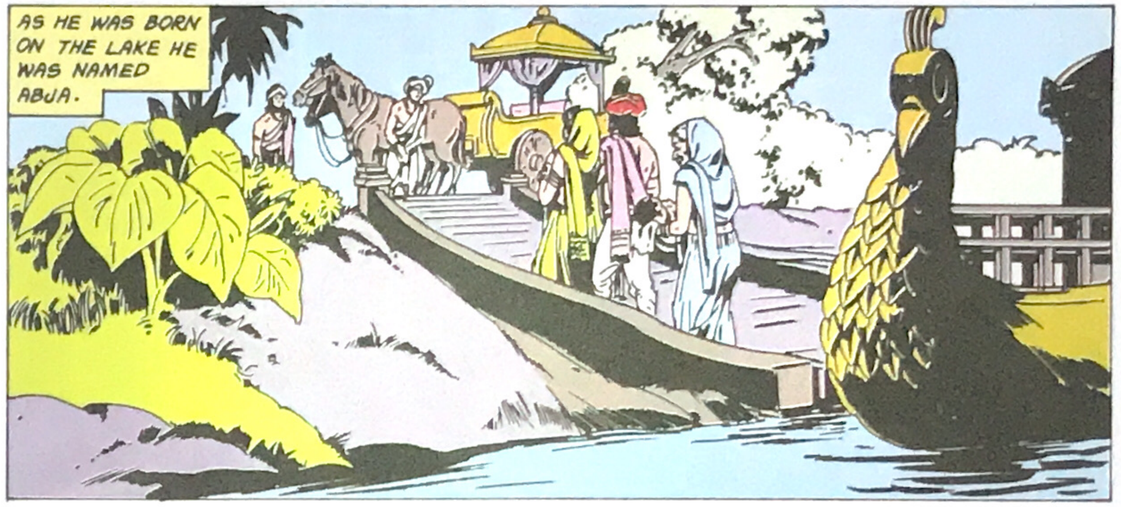
THAT WISH TOO THE KING SOON FULFILLED.

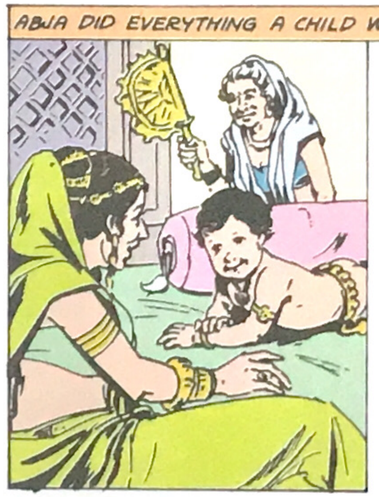


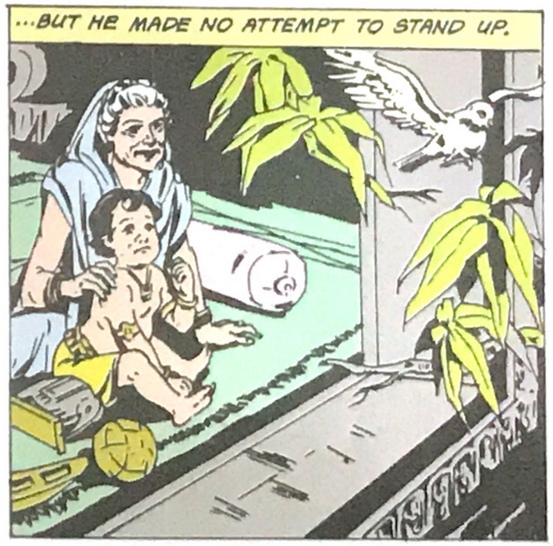


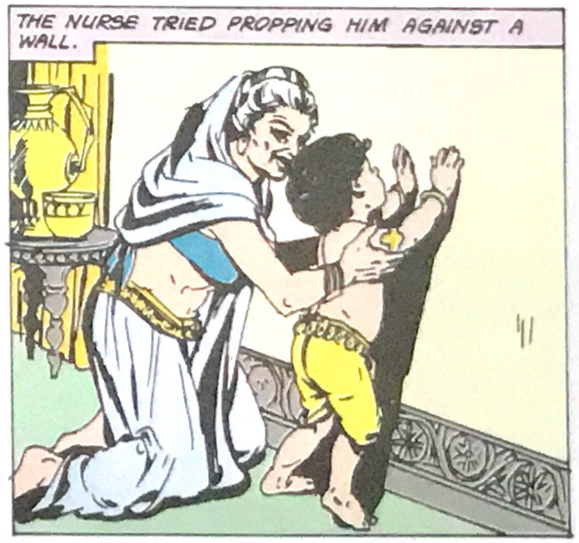
AND IN THE SILENCE OF THAT LAKE...

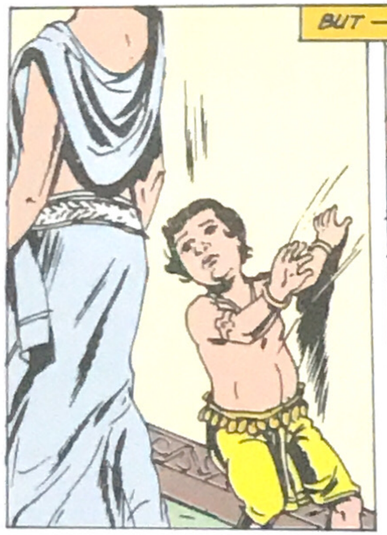

...A SON WAS BORN TO THEM.

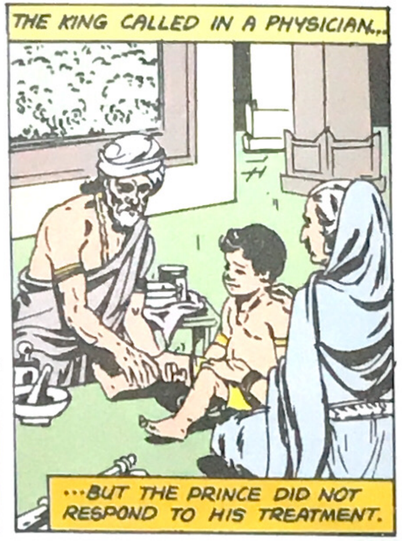

AS HE WAS BORN ON THE LAKE HE WAS NAMED ABJA.

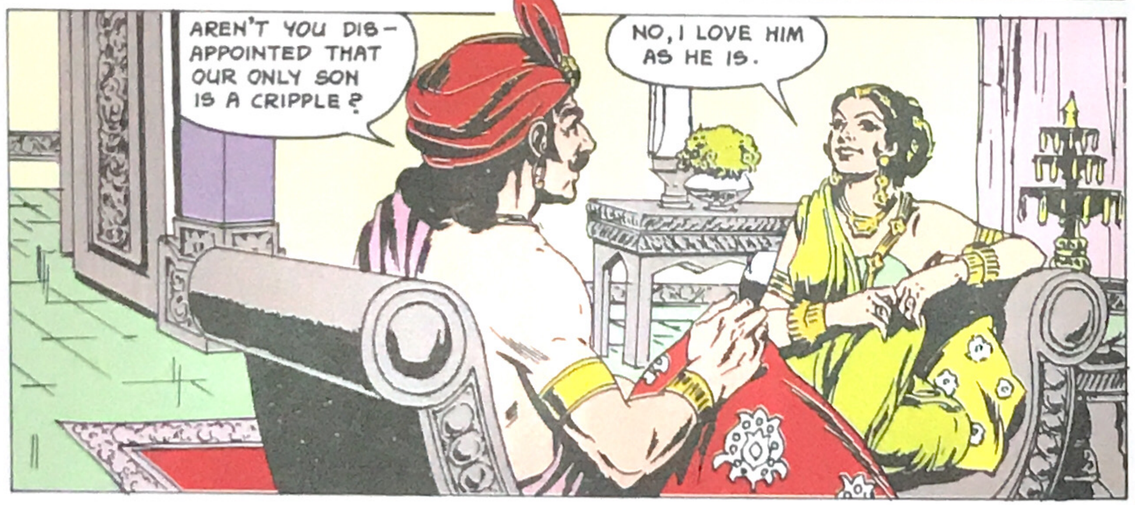

ABJA DID EVERYTHING A CHILD WAS EXPECTED TO DO...


...BUT HE MADE NO ATTEMPT TO STAND UP.

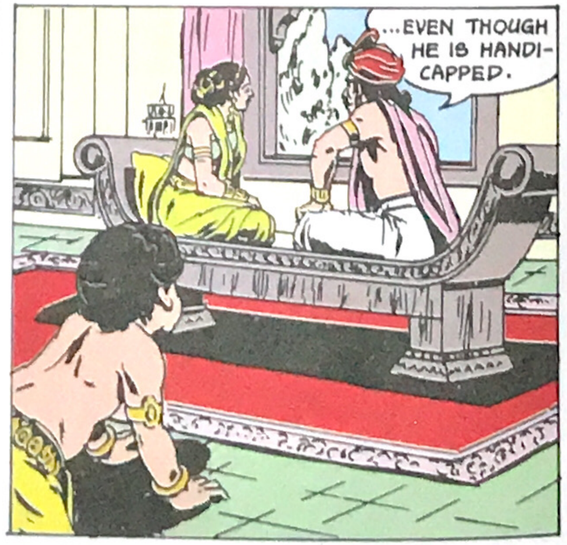

THE NURSE TRIED PROPPING HIM AGAINST A WALL.


BUT —

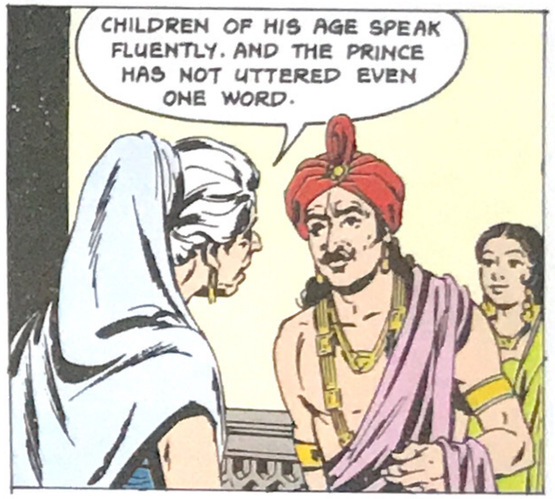

THE KING CALLED IN A PHYSICIAN...
...BUT THE PRINCE DID NOT RESPOND TO HIS TREATMENT.

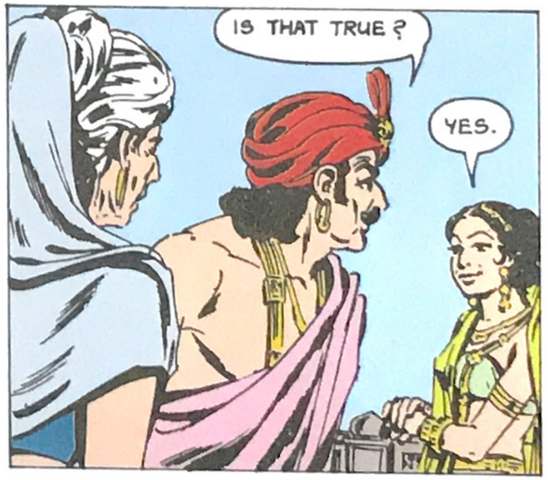

AREN'T YOU DIS-APPOINTED THAT OUR ONLY SON IS A CRIPPLE?
NO, I LOVE HIM AS HE IS.

I'M GLAD. BECAUSE I HAVE DECIDED THAT HE SHALL SUCCEED ME...


...EVEN THOUGH HE IS HANDI-CAPPED.

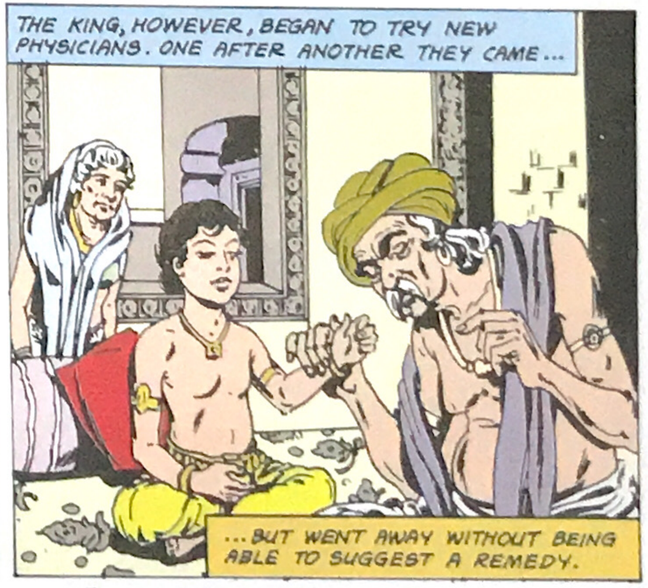
BUT THE KING WAS IN FOR ANOTHER SHOCK. A FEW WEEKS LATER —
MAHARAJ, COULD YOU ASK A PHYSICIAN TO EXAMINE THE PRINCE?
WHY? WHAT'S WRONG?


CHILDREN OF HIS AGE SPEAK FLUENTLY. AND THE PRINCE HAS NOT UTTERED EVEN ONE WORD.


IS THAT TRUE?
YES.

A CRIPPLED KING, PEOPLE MAY ACCEPT. BUT WILL THEY ACCEPT A DUMB ONE?

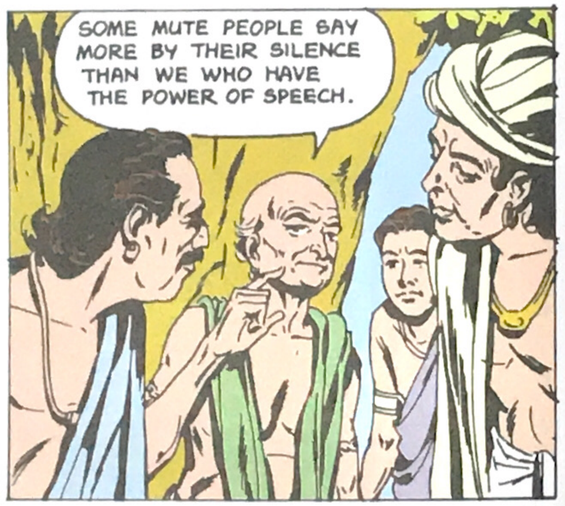
LAME OR MUTE, HE IS MY SON. I ACCEPT HIM AS HE IS.


THE KING, HOWEVER, BEGAN TO TRY NEW PHYSICIANS. ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY CAME...
...BUT WENT AWAY WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SUGGEST A REMEDY.

WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW ?
WE SHOULD TREAT HIM LIKE A NORMAL CHILD.

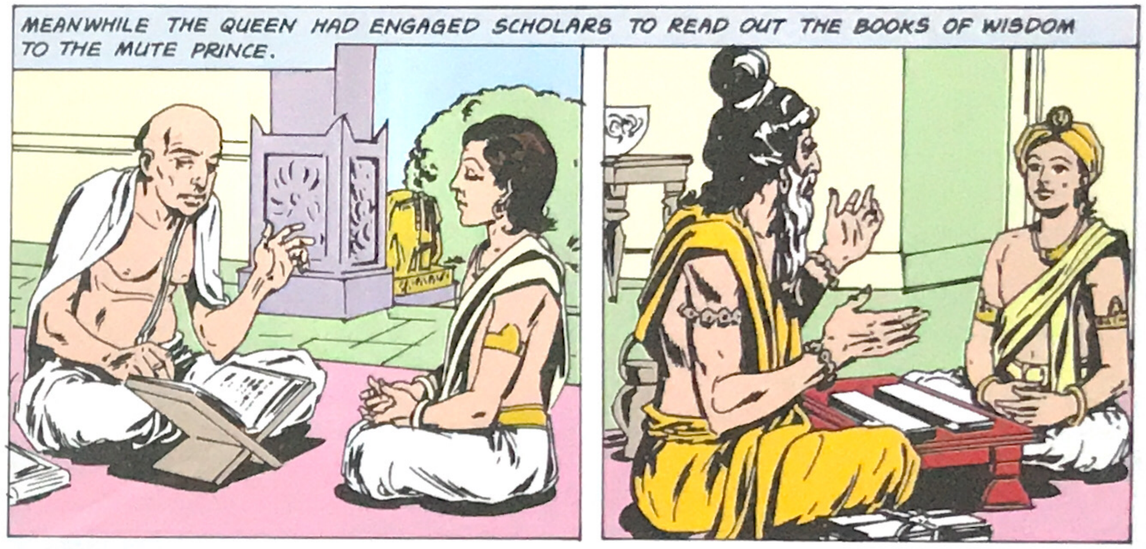
GIVE HIM A GOOD EDUCATION...
WHAT CAN A DUMB CHILD LEARN?

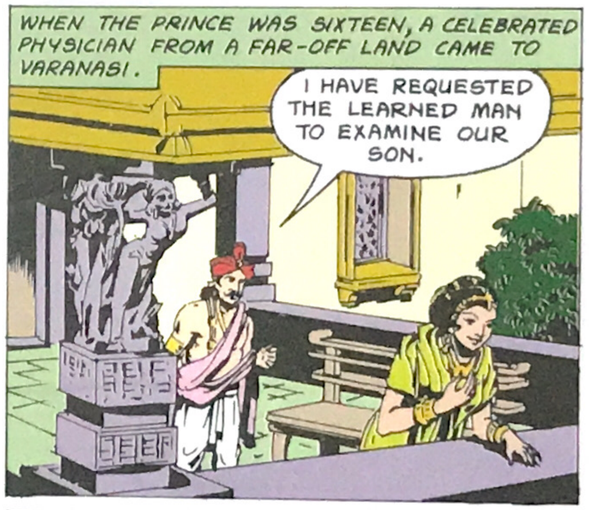
THE COMMONERS TOO HAD THEIR DOUBTS.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR DUMB PRINCE?
WELL...


SOME MUTE PEOPLE SAY MORE BY THEIR SILENCE THAN WE WHO HAVE THE POWER OF SPEECH.

BUT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THEM.

THAT TOO IS A HANDICAP!

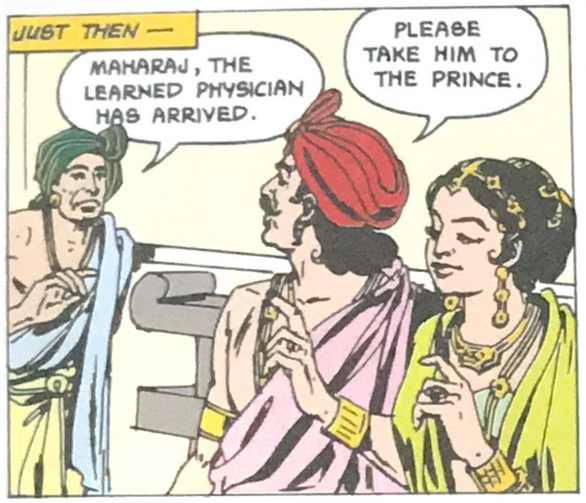

MEANWHILE THE QUEEN HAD ENGAGED SCHOLARS TO READ OUT THE BOOKS OF WISDOM TO THE MUTE PRINCE.


WHEN THE PRINCE WAS SIXTEEN, A CELEBRATED PHYSICIAN FROM A FAR-OFF LAND CAME TO VARANASI.
I HAVE REQUESTED THE LEARNED MAN TO EXAMINE OUR SON.

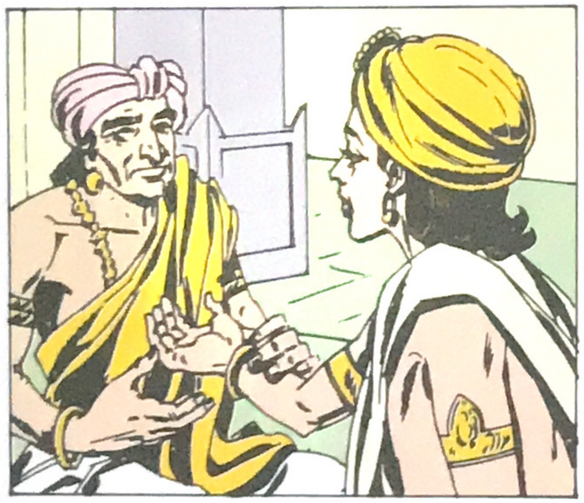
EVERY PHYSICIAN TRIES TO FIND OUT WHAT OUR SON CANNOT DO. THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED IN WHAT HE CAN DO.

WHAT CAN ONE WHO CANNOT WALK AND CANNOT TALK DO?
HE CAN TALK. HE SPEAKS TO ME... WITH HIS EYES... AND...

...AND WHAT THEY SAY FILLS ME WITH PEACE... LIKE THE SILENT FOREST... THE STILL LAKE...


JUST THEN —
MAHARAJ, THE LEARNED PHYSICIAN HAS ARRIVED.
PLEASE TAKE HIM TO THE PRINCE.

PLEASE GIVE ME YOUR HAND.



NOW OPEN YOUR MOUTH.

BREATHE IN... HOLD YOUR BREATH... BREATHE OUT...

NOW ANSWER ME.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

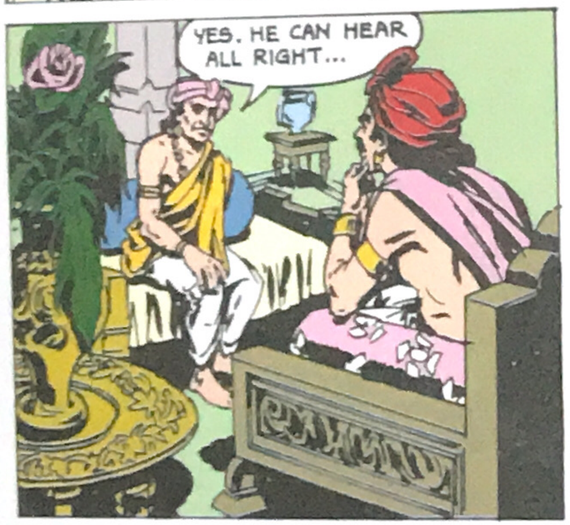
WHO ARE YOU?

CAN'T YOU SPEAK?

WELL. THAT'S ALL.

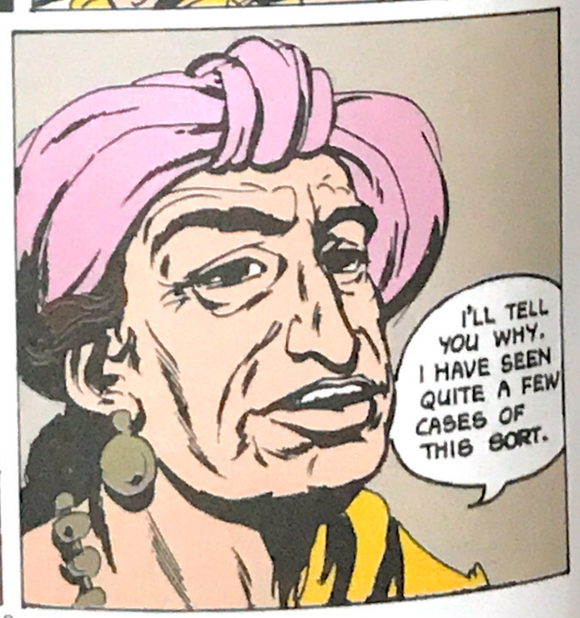
LATER —
HE IS NEITHER LAME...

...NOR DUMB.
ARE YOU SURE?


YES. HE CAN HEAR ALL RIGHT...

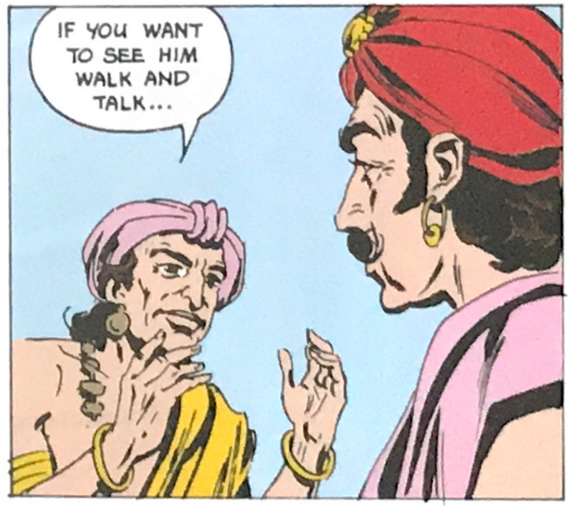
...AND THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH HIS ORGANS OF SPEECH...

...OR HIS SPINE... OR HIS LEGS!
THEN WHY...


I'LL TELL YOU WHY. I HAVE SEEN QUITE A FEW CASES OF THIS SORT.

THE PRINCE IS ONLY PRETENDING TO BE LAME AND DUMB.

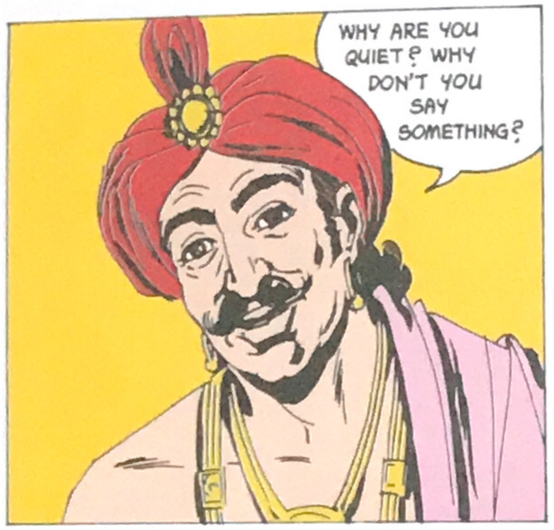
PRETENDING?
YES!

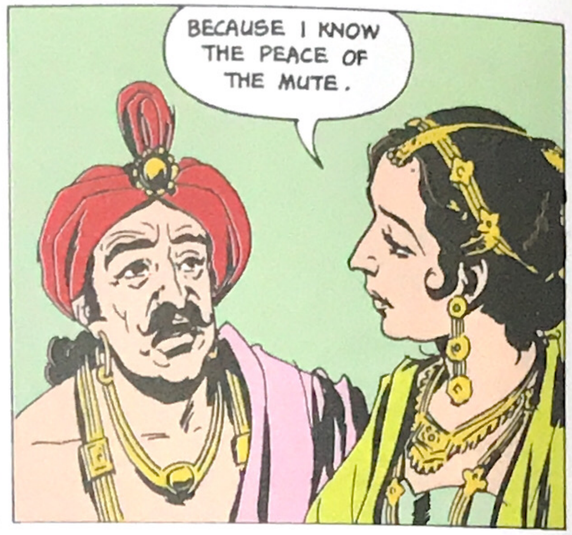

IF YOU WANT TO SEE HIM WALK AND TALK...

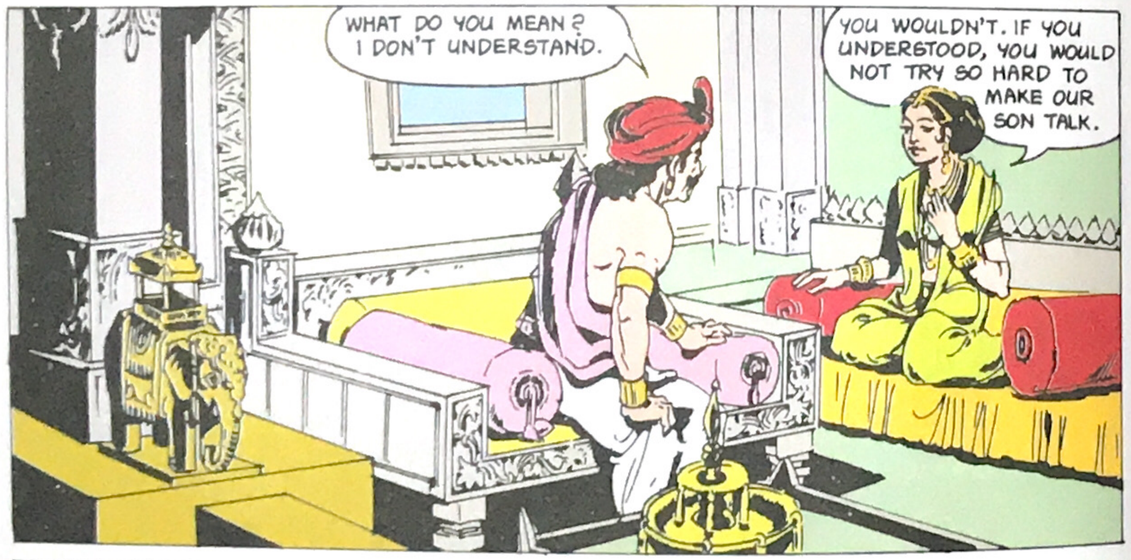
...YOU MUST DO AS I TELL YOU. LISTEN CAREFULLY...

LATER —
...THAT'S WHAT THE PHYSICIAN RECOMMENDED. YOU MUST NOT STOP ME.

I'LL BE DOING IT FOR HIS OWN GOOD.

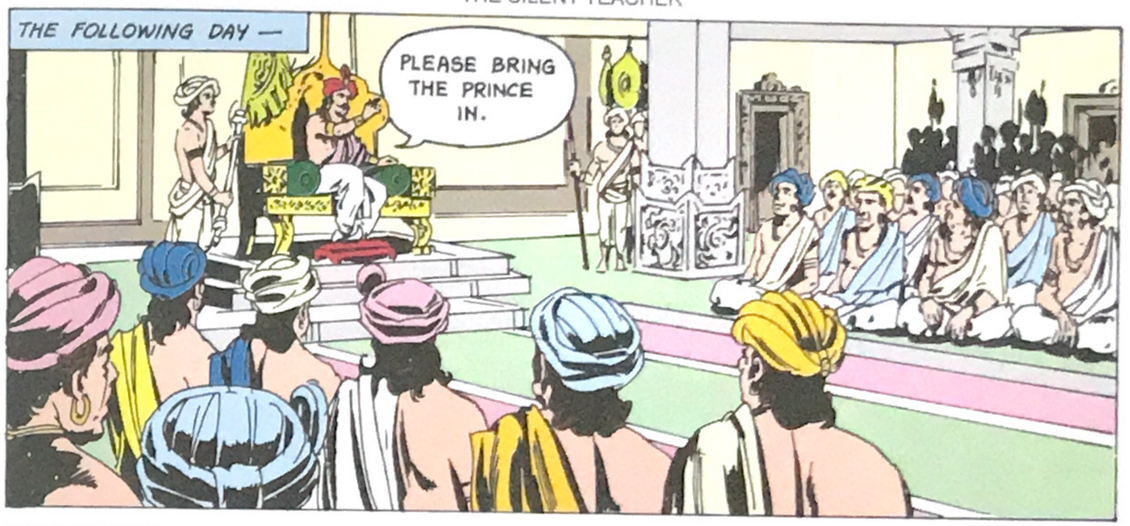

WHY ARE YOU QUIET? WHY DON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?

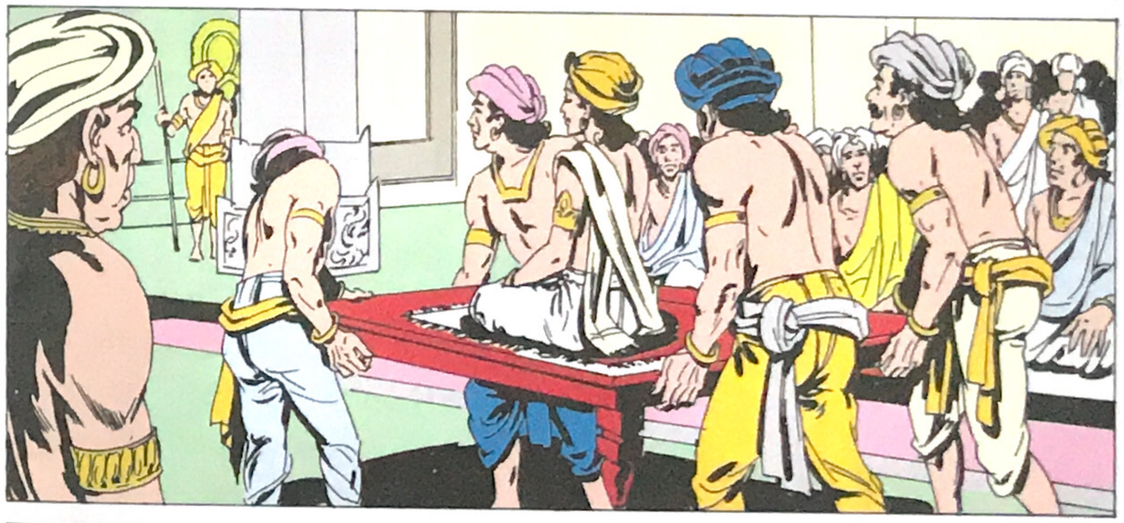

BECAUSE I KNOW THE PEACE OF THE MUTE.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
YOU WOULDN'T. IF YOU UNDERSTOOD, YOU WOULD NOT TRY SO HARD TO MAKE OUR SON TALK.

YOU'D TRY TO LISTEN...
LISTEN TO WHAT?

TO HIS SILENCE.
PLEASE! MUST YOU ALWAYS TALK IN RIDDLES?


THE FOLLOWING DAY —
PLEASE BRING THE PRINCE IN.



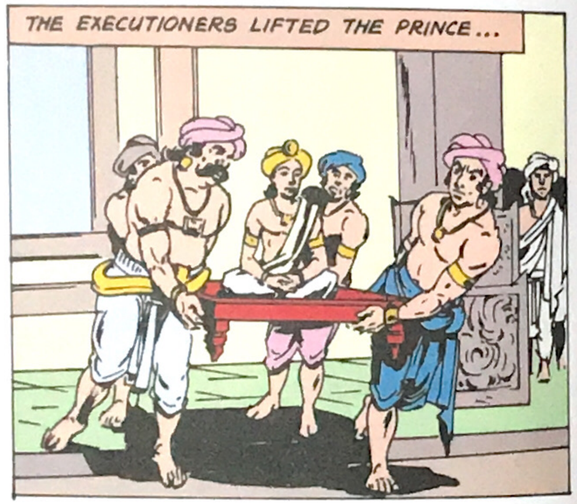
PRINCE ABJA, THE MAN WHO SITS ON THIS THRONE AFTER ME HAS TO RULE A VAST KINGDOM.

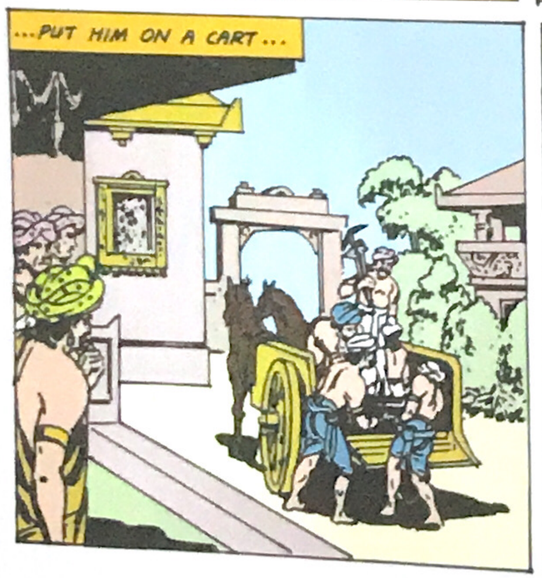
SINCE YOU CAN NEITHER WALK NOR SPEAK, YOU CANNOT RULE EITHER.

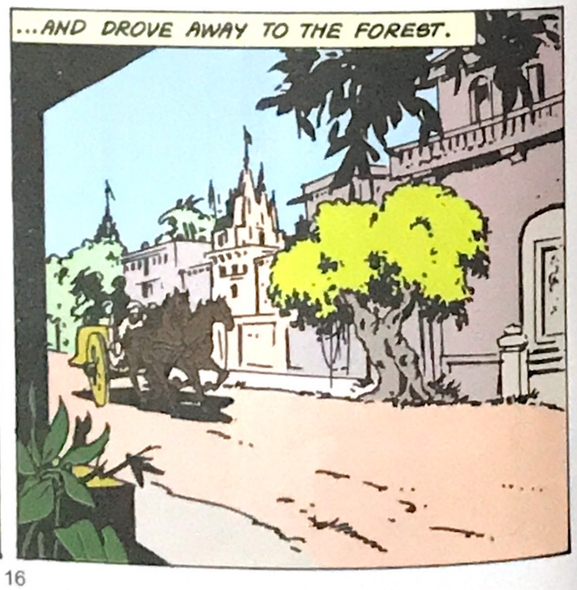
SO I HAVE ORDERED THE EXECUTIONERS TO BURY YOU ALIVE.

THE DUMB PRINCE REMAINED SILENT...

...AND NOT A VOICE SPOKE OUT IN PROTEST.


THE EXECUTIONERS LIFTED THE PRINCE...

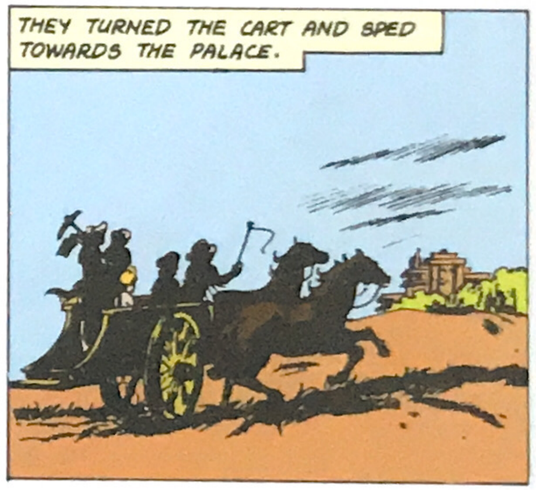

...PUT HIM ON A CART...

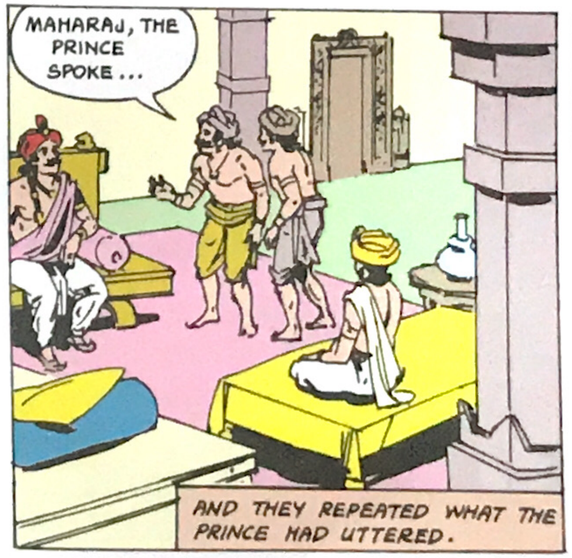

...AND DROVE AWAY TO THE FOREST.

ON THE WAY —
IS THIS CITY OF VARANASI DESERTED OR INHABITED?
EH?!

DID YOU...
DID YOU SPEAK?

IT'S THE PRINCE! THE PRINCE SPOKE!
LET'S TAKE HIM BACK TO THE KING.

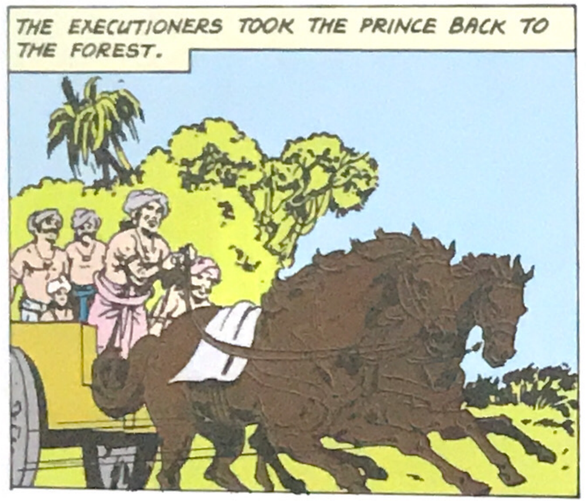

THEY TURNED THE CART AND SPED TOWARDS THE PALACE.


MAHARAJ, THE PRINCE SPOKE...
AND THEY REPEATED WHAT THE PRINCE HAD UTTERED.

MY SON!

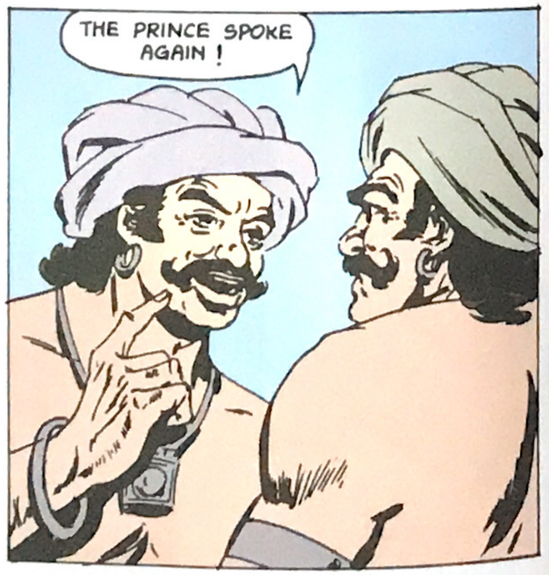
I AM SO GLAD! YOU WILL SPEAK FROM TODAY, WON'T YOU?

WHEN THE PRINCE MADE NO ANSWER—
TAKE HIM AWAY.


THE EXECUTIONERS TOOK THE PRINCE BACK TO THE FOREST.

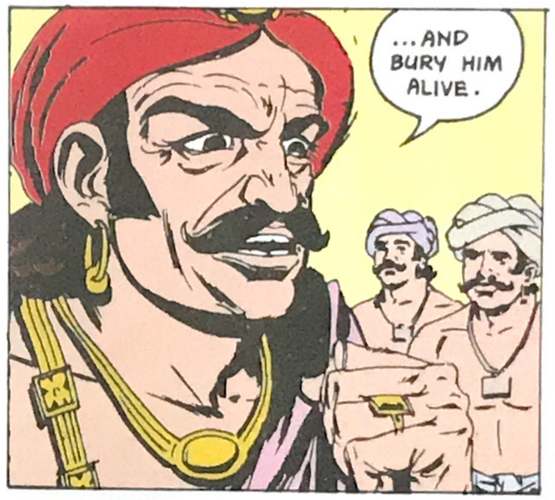
ON THE WAY THEY PASSED A FUNERAL PROCESSION.

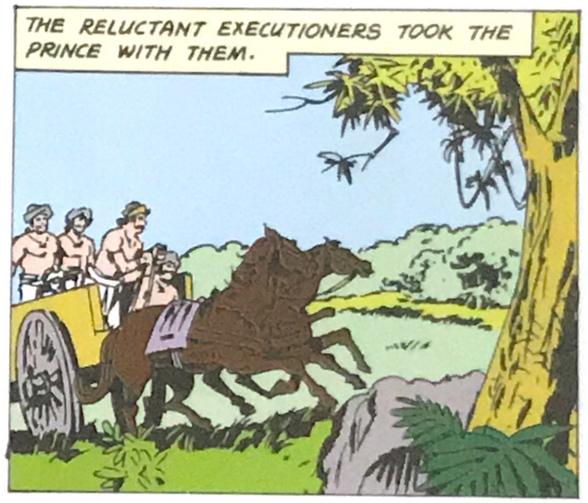
IS THIS CORPSE THAT OF A DEAD MAN OR A LIVING MAN?
EH!


THE PRINCE SPOKE AGAIN!

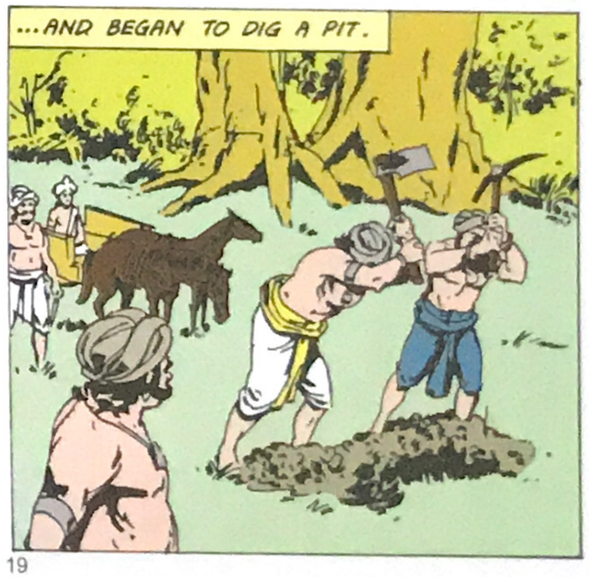
THEY TOOK THE PRINCE BACK TO THE KING.
IS IT TRUE THAT YOU SPOKE AGAIN?
THERE WAS NO ANSWER.

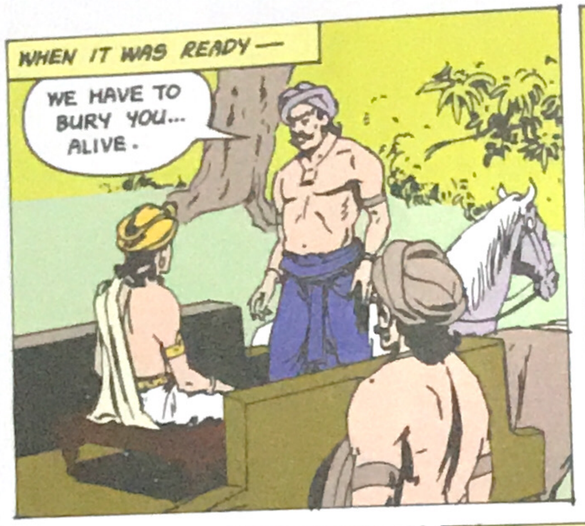
TAKE HIM AWAY...


...AND BURY HIM ALIVE.

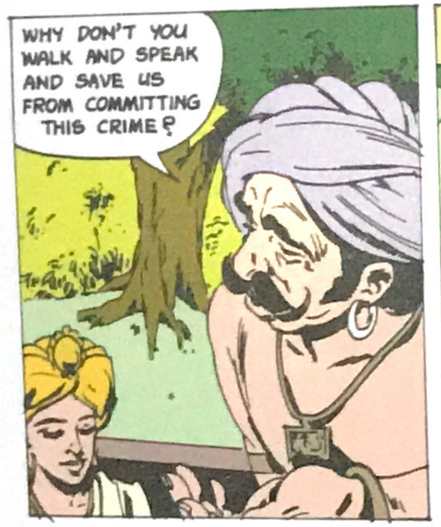

THE RELUCTANT EXECUTIONERS TOOK THE PRINCE WITH THEM.

WHEN THEY REACHED THE FOREST THEY GOT DOWN...


...AND BEGAN TO DIG A PIT.


WHEN IT WAS READY —
WE HAVE TO BURY YOU... ALIVE.

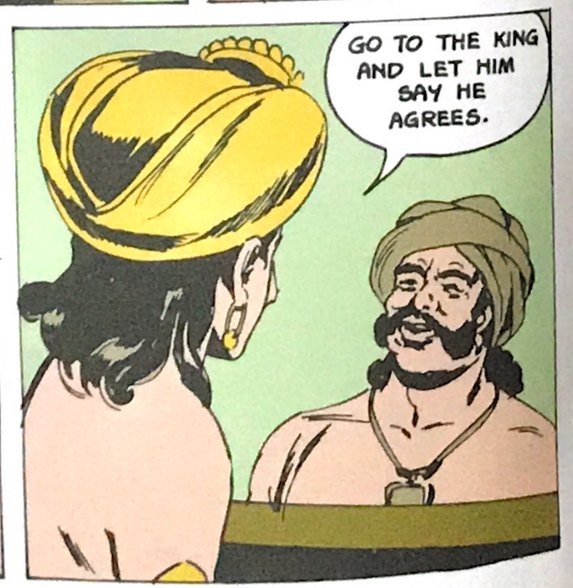
WE HATE DOING IT. BUT WE HAVE TO OBEY THE KING'S ORDERS.


WHY DON'T YOU WALK AND SPEAK AND SAVE US FROM COMMITTING THIS CRIME?

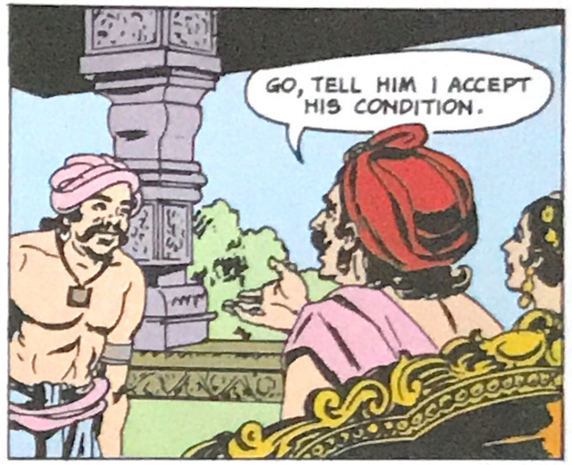
FOR A MOMENT THERE WAS SILENCE.

THEN —
ALL RIGHT. I'LL WALK BACK TO THE PALACE AND SPEAK TO THE KING...

...PROVIDED HE AGREES TO GRANT ME A WISH.
HE'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING. YOU HAVE ONLY TO ASK.

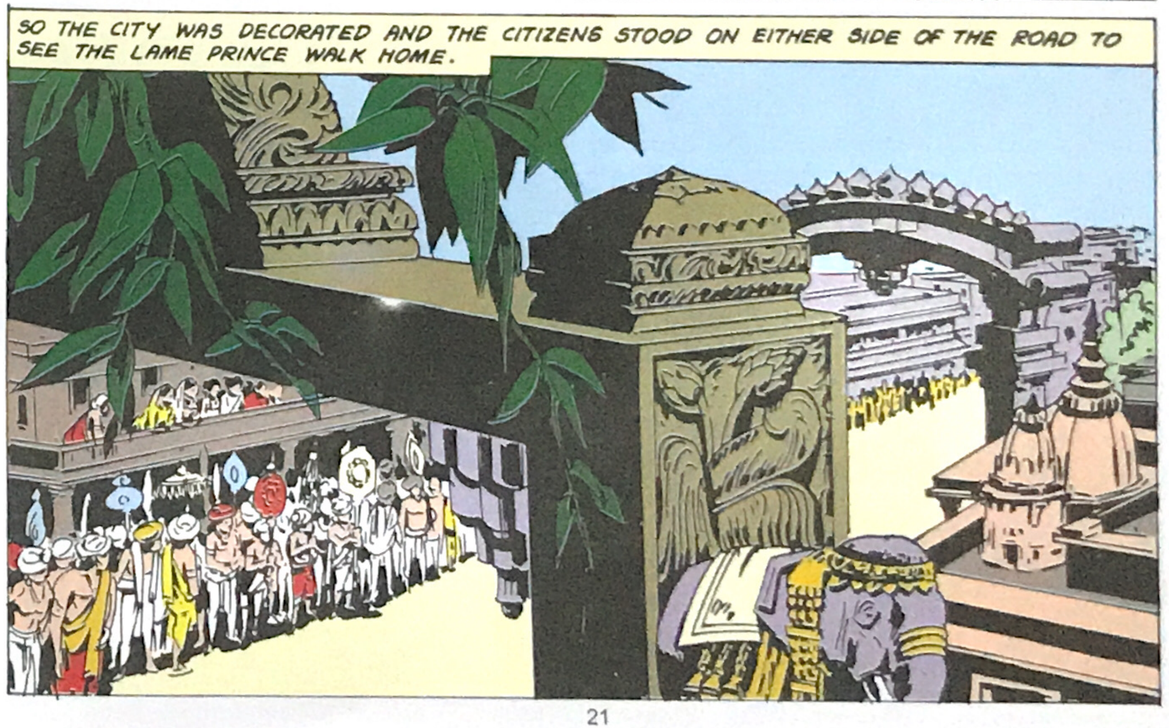

GO TO THE KING AND LET HIM SAY HE AGREES.

THE KING OF COURSE READILY AGREED.
WHY ONE, I'LL GRANT HIM A THOUSAND WISHES.

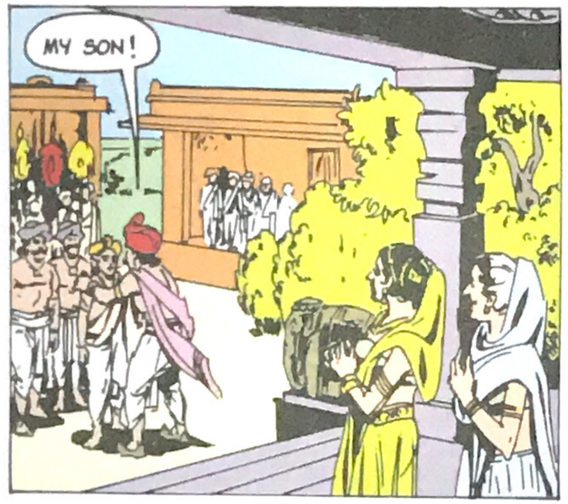

GO, TELL HIM I ACCEPT HIS CONDITION.

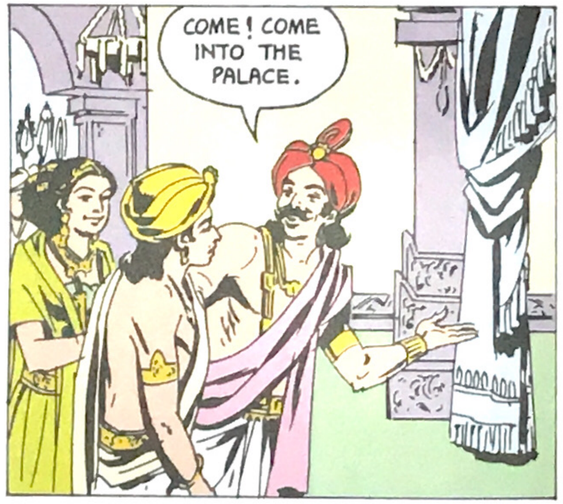
YOU HAVE AGREED TO GRANT HIM HIS WISH, WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT IT IS.

IT WILL BE THE THRONE... KINGSHIP... POWER... MONEY! WHAT ELSE COULD A YOUNG PRINCE WANT?


SO THE CITY WAS DECORATED AND THE CITIZENS STOOD ON EITHER SIDE OF THE ROAD TO SEE THE LAME PRINCE WALK HOME.

HERE HE COMES!


MY SON!


COME! COME INTO THE PALACE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT? LET ME HEAR YOU SPEAK.

I SEEK YOUR PERMISSION...

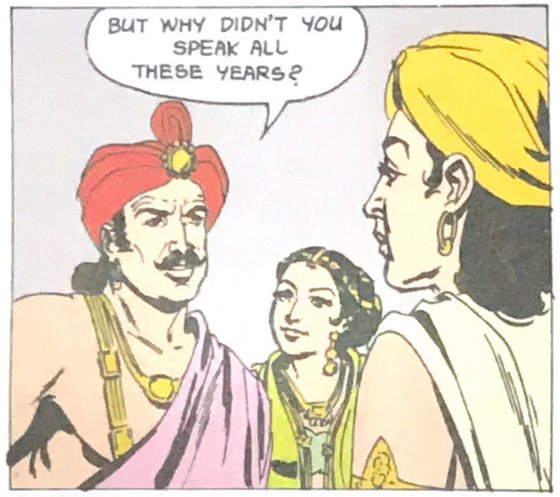
...TO BECOME AN ASCETIC.
NO!

HAVE I LONGED TO HEAR YOU SPEAK ONLY FOR THIS? NO! NO! NO!

YOU HAVE GIVEN YOUR WORD...

HEARTLESS WOMAN. HOW CAN YOU PART SO EASILY WITH A SON YOU CLAIM TO LOVE?

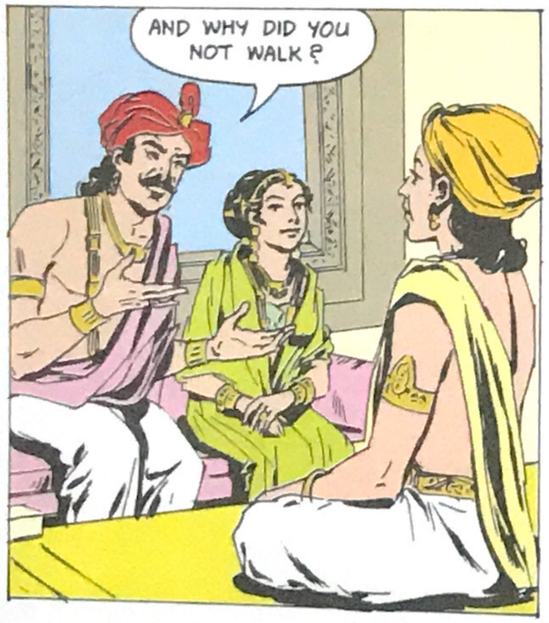
LOVE IS FREEDOM, MY LORD. LET HIM GO.


BUT WHY DIDN'T YOU SPEAK ALL THESE YEARS?

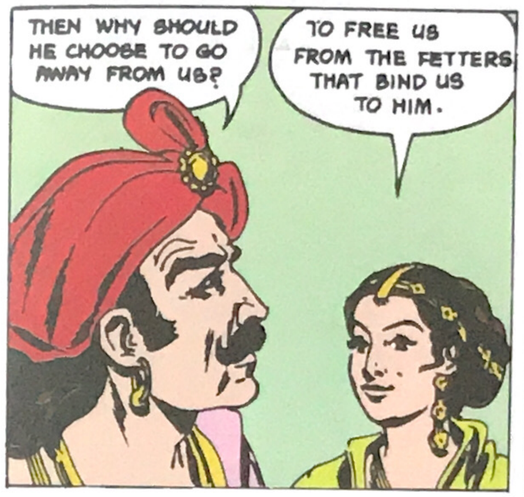
THE PRINCE LOOKED AT HIS MOTHER.
HE DID SPEAK! ONLY THE LANGUAGE HE USED WAS SILENCE.

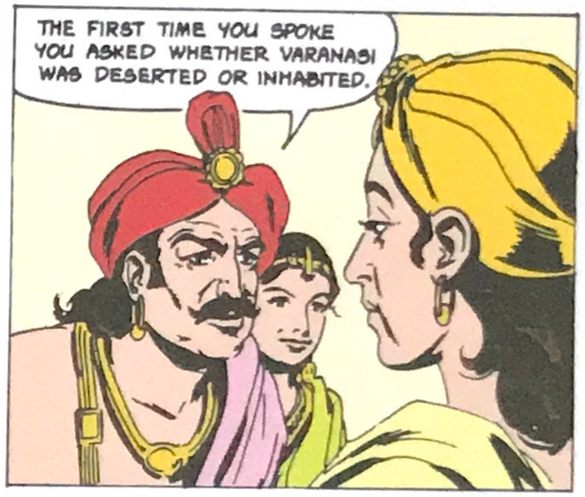
SILENCE SOMETIMES IS MORE ELOQUENT THAN ALL THE LOUD SPEECHES AND DECLARATIONS OF ORATORS.

ESPECIALLY IF THE MESSAGE ONE WANTS TO SPREAD IS ONE OF PEACE AND LOVE.

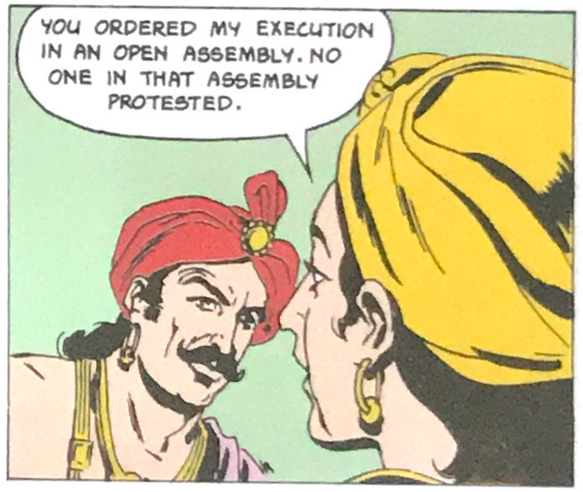

AND WHY DID YOU NOT WALK?

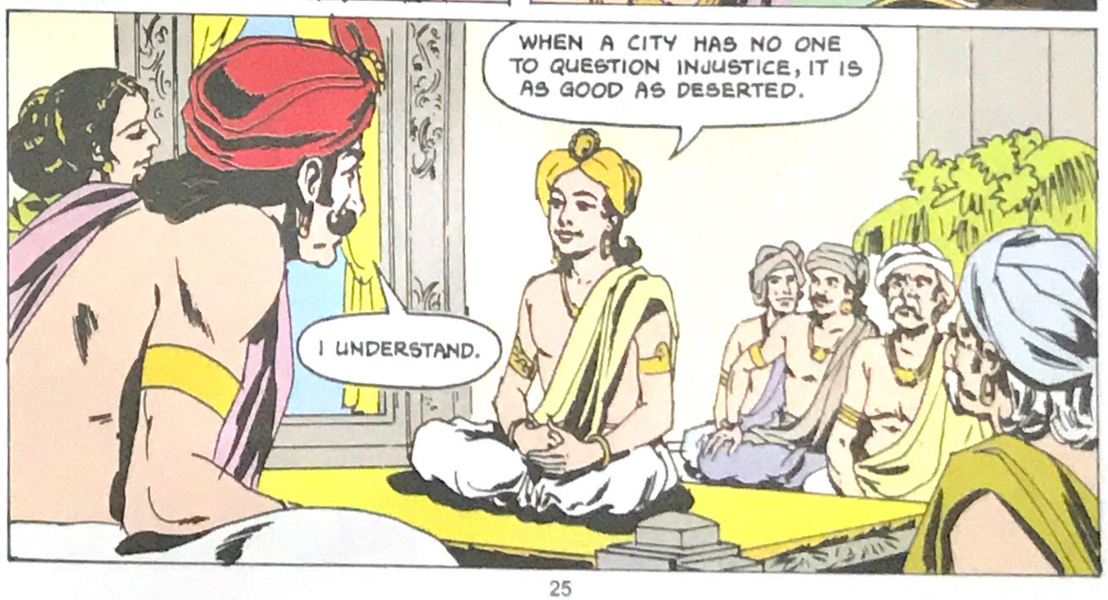
THE QUEEN REPLIED ONCE AGAIN.
HE DID NOT NEED TO GO ANYWHERE. HE HAD ARRIVED.

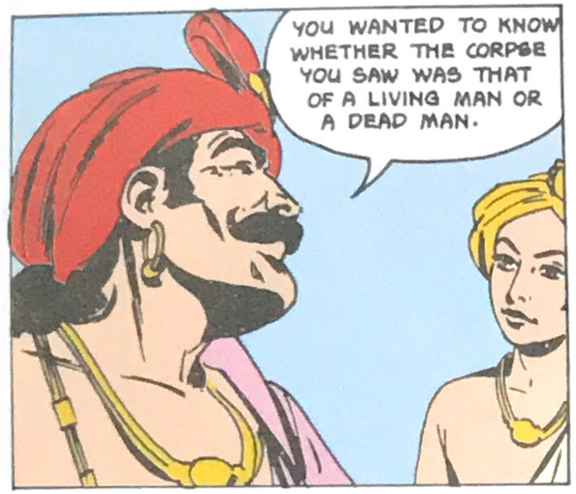

THEN WHY SHOULD HE CHOOSE TO GO AWAY FROM US?
TO FREE US FROM THE FETTERS THAT BIND US TO HIM.


THE FIRST TIME YOU SPOKE YOU ASKED WHETHER VARANASI WAS DESERTED OR INHABITED.

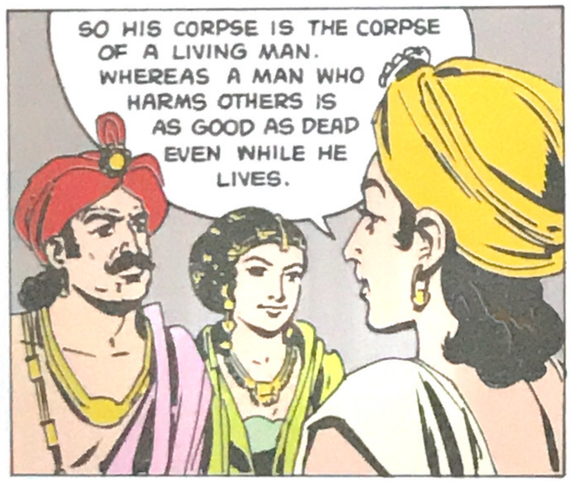
WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY THAT QUESTION?


YOU ORDERED MY EXECUTION IN AN OPEN ASSEMBLY. NO ONE IN THAT ASSEMBLY PROTESTED.


WHEN A CITY HAS NO ONE TO QUESTION INJUSTICE, IT IS AS GOOD AS DESERTED.
I UNDERSTAND.


YOU WANTED TO KNOW WHETHER THE CORPSE YOU SAW WAS THAT OF A LIVING MAN OR A DEAD MAN.

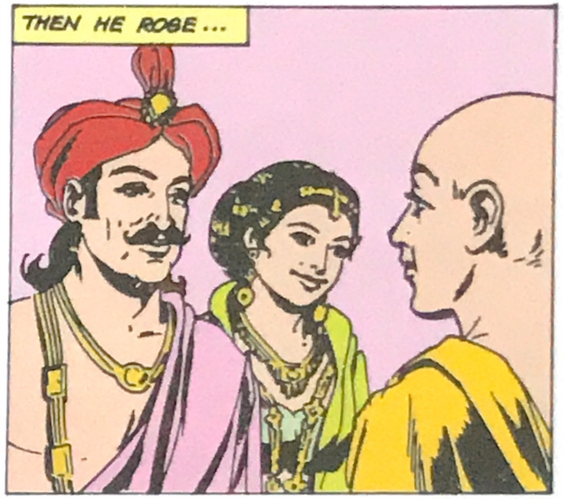
A MAN WHO DOES GOOD DEEDS LIVES IN THE MEMORY OF MEN EVEN THOUGH HIS BODY IS DEAD.

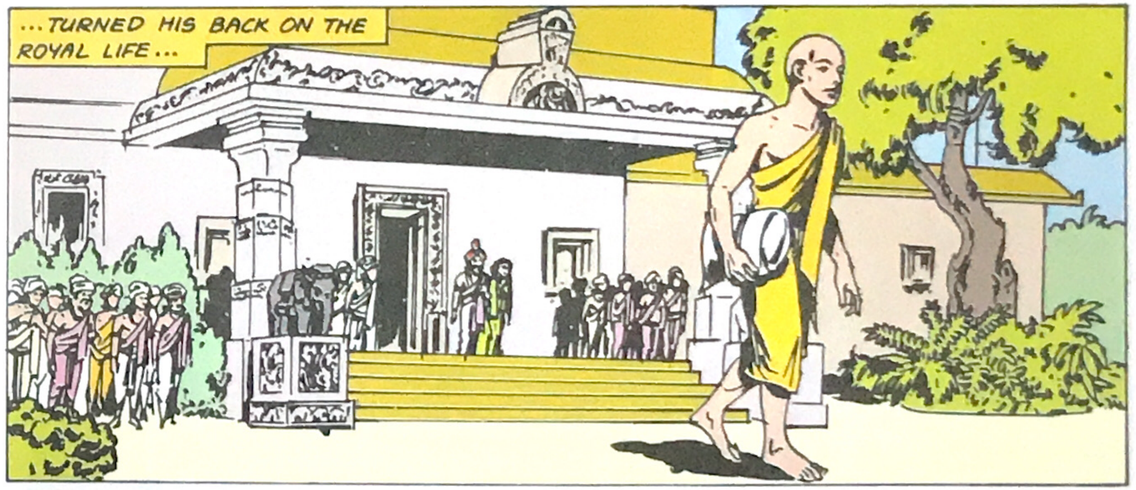

SO HIS CORPSE IS THE CORPSE OF A LIVING MAN. WHEREAS A MAN WHO HARMS OTHERS IS AS GOOD AS DEAD EVEN WHILE HE LIVES.

SO HIS CORPSE IS THE CORPSE OF A DEAD MAN.

MY SON, YOU ARE WISE BEYOND YOUR YEARS. I GRANT YOU YOUR WISH.
SALUTATIONS TO YOU, O TEACHER.

THE PRINCE DISCARDED HIS PRINCELY ROBES AND FELL AT THE FEET OF HIS PARENTS.


THEN HE ROSE...


...TURNED HIS BACK ON THE ROYAL LIFE...

...AND WALKED AWAY.

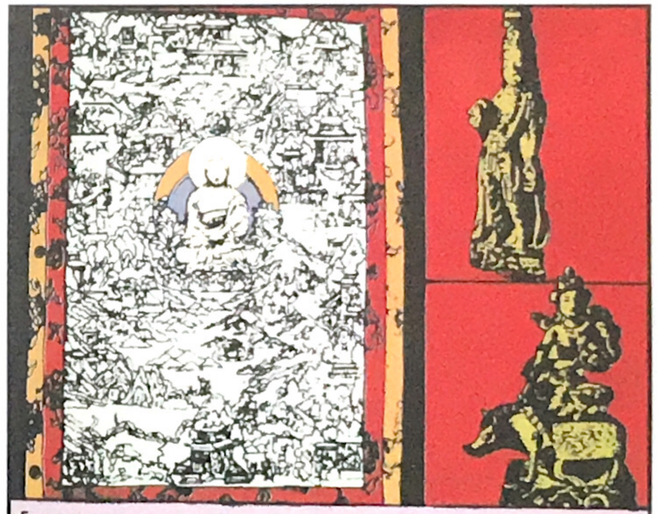
Tibet, the Roof of the World, is a land of Buddhist shrines, monasteries and monks.

Buddhism came to Tibet in the 7th century when king Songtsen Gampo married two Buddhist princesses of China and Nepal. The princesses converted the king to their faith and he, in turn, proselytized the whole land.

Jokhang, the holiest and also the oldest shrine in Tibet, houses the Buddha image brought by the Chinese princess.

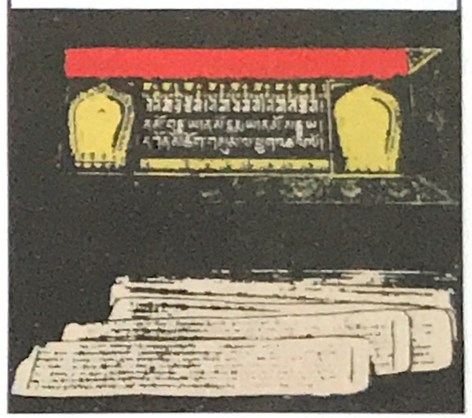
Devotees from all over Tibet visit the shrine with their offerings of butter candles.

In 775, a famous Buddhist teacher, Padmasambhava, was invited from India. Under his guidance, the first monastery, Samye, was built and Tibetan monks were ordained.

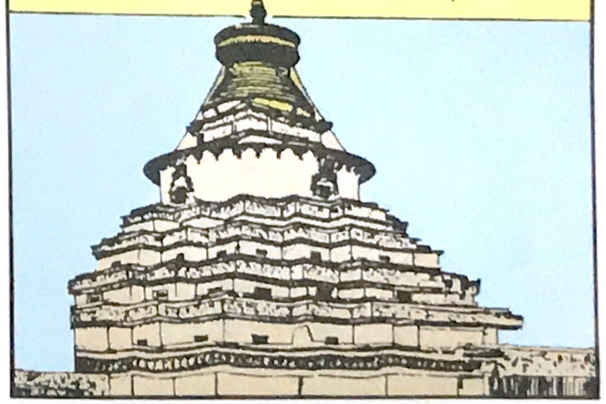


Every monastery is a treasure-house of Tibetan art.

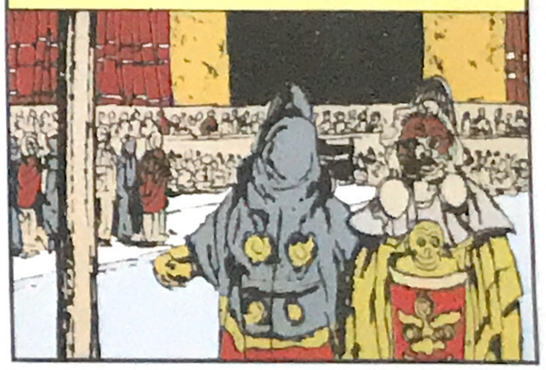
There are several hundreds of Tibetan books and Buddhist scriptures – hand-written as well as block-printed. One of the treasures is the Buddhist canon written on palm leaves.



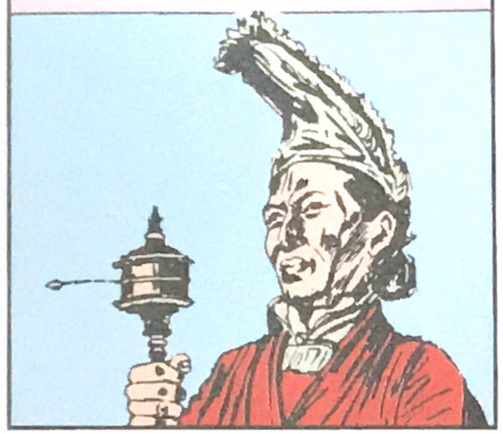
Associated with the monastery are small and large chortens or commemorative shrines, similar to the stupas of India.



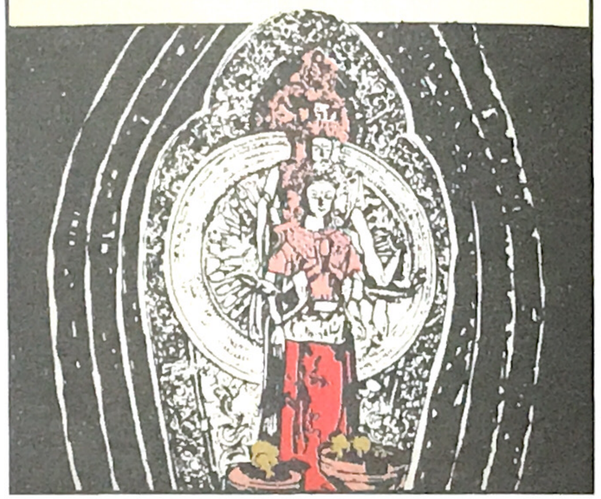
During annual festivals, people gather in the courtyards of monasteries, to watch masked dancers enacting scenes from Buddha's life.



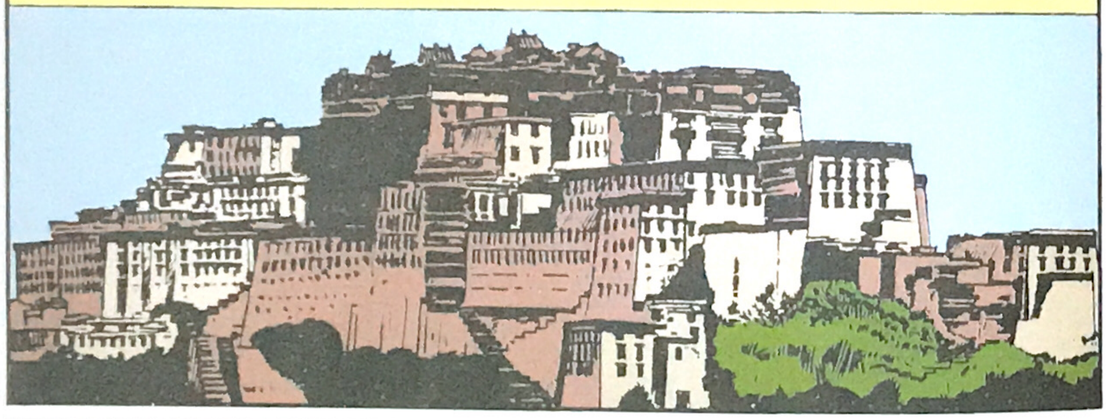
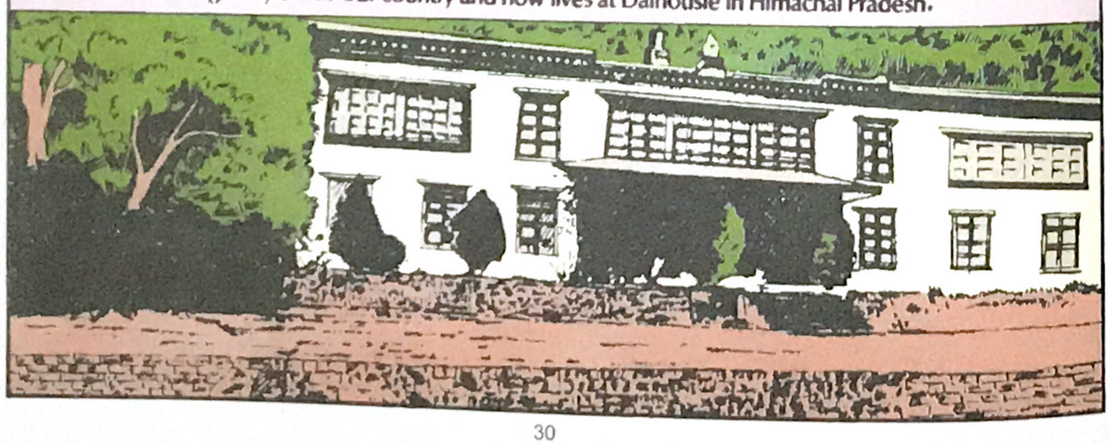
Believing that prayers need not be uttered to be heard, the Tibetans continuously spin the prayer-wheel. The prayer-wheel contains strips of paper on which are written the words "OM MANI PADME HUM" which mean – The jewel is within the lotus.



According to the Tibetans, Chenrezi, the Buddha of Mercy, took earthly form in the first Dalai Lama and was reincarnated in each subsequent Dalai Lama.



The Potala Palace in Lhasa is the official residence of the Dalai Lama. It is the most majestic building in the whole of Asia.



Till 1959, when the Chinese took it over, Tibet was ruled by the 14th Dalai Lama and a hierarchy of monks. The Dalai Lama sought asylum in our country and now lives at Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh.